

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION (CME), CERTIFIED CME AND ACCREDITED CME

Multiple terms are currently being used to refer to educational activities for physicians. Three of those terms have been defined by major stakeholder organizations in the CME community, while others have not. The incorrect use of a defined term or any use of a term with no standardized definition can lead to miscommunication. This Fact Sheet will review the three terms that have been defined.

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION

The definition of Continuing Medical Education adopted by the American Medical Association (AMA) and the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) is:

“CME consists of educational activities which serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills, and professional performance and relationships that a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public or the profession. The content of CME is the body of knowledge and skills generally recognized and accepted by the profession as within the basic medical sciences, the discipline of clinical medicine and the provision of health care to the public.” (1, 2)

This definition of Continuing Medical Education includes a very broad scope of activities, more than just those that are often referred to as “traditional CME,” and topics.

CERTIFIED CME

The AMA has defined Certified CME as:

“1. Non-promotional learning activities certified for credit prior to the activity by an organization authorized by the credit system owner, or 2. Non-promotional learning activities for which the credit system owner directly awards credit.” (1)

This definition includes all activities certified for credit, prior to the activity, through the medical profession’s three major credit systems owned by three professional organizations: the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP credit), the AMA [AMA Physician Recognition Award (PRA) Credit], and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA credit).

ACCREDITED CME

The AMA has granted organizations accredited through the ACCME accreditation system, which includes the State Medical Societies (SMS) recognized by the ACCME acting as accrediting bodies in their states, the privilege to certify some CME activities for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*. Other CME activities are certified for CME credit directly by the AMA. The ACCME has defined accredited CME as follows:

“The ACCME uses the term **accredited CME** to encompass the educational programs and educational activities of providers accredited within its system. The ACCME holds (state and ACCME) accredited providers accountable for all activities presented under the ‘mark’ of the ACCME/SMS accreditation statement. Any requirements we promulgate are applicable to all continuing medical education activities presented by ACCME/SMS accredited providers. In turn, the ACCME stands accountable to the public, the physicians, the government, the ACCME member organizations and the organizations of medicine, in general, for the manner in which this **accredited CME** is conducted and presented. The ACCME cannot be held accountable for all CME for which learners receive ‘credit’ or all CME that is ‘certified for credit’ – but only for CME presented under the umbrella of an ACCME (or state medical society) accreditation statement.” (2)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Other organizations have used the term “accredited” in a variety of contexts. As used by the ACCME, however, “accredited CME” refers only to some activities certified for **AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™**: those activities certified for **AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™** by organizations accredited by the ACCME, or SMS recognized by the ACCME, and authorized to award the credit by the AMA.

In addition, “accredited organizations” is a term that has generally been used to refer to organizations that have been accredited under the AMA or AOA CME credit systems. “Certified activities” has generally been used to refer to the CME activities developed by those organizations.

When using any of these terms, an awareness of how they have been defined by some organizations or how they are generally used, will help communication inside and outside the CME community.

SUMMARY

CME is any educational activity that meets the definition noted above. Certified CME are those CME activities that meet the definition above and carry AAFP, AMA, or AOA credit. Accredited CME, as defined by the ACCME, refers only to those activities certified for **AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™** by ACCME/SMS accredited providers.

References

1. <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/455/pra-booklet.pdf> (page 2)
2. http://www.accme.org/dir_docs/doc_upload/6482a6e7-27be-4394-831e-91ea535ed424_uploaddocument.pdf